

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fax

*National Wildlife Refuge System
Alaska, Region 7*



CELEBRATING A
CENTURY
OF CONSERVATION

227

Regional Chief
1011 E. Tudor Road, MS 225
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
Phone: (907) 786-3354
Fax: (907) 786-3998

To:

Mike Barton - 586-8365

From:

Jerry Shoebale

Date:

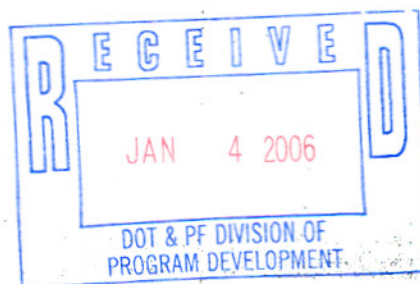
12/29/05

Pages to follow:

2

Subject:

Mike





United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1011 E. Tudor Rd.
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199

IN REPLY REFER TO:

NWRS706-077.jas

DEC 28 2005

Mr. Mike Barton
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
3132 Channel Drive
Juneau, Alaska 99801-7898

Reference: DRAFT 2006-2008 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program,
Alaska Highway Alaska Public Lands Information Center and Rest Area

In reviewing the draft 2006-08 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) it has come to our attention that the new visitor center and highway rest area planned for Tok is no longer listed. The project was listed in the October 30, 2002, pre-draft 2004-2006 STIP as the *Alaska Highway APLIC and Rest Area*. With the design development for this facility near completion and Federal funds available for land acquisition, this project will be ready to move into the construction phase and needs to be identified in the STIP to be eligible for funding.

For over five years the Fish and Wildlife Service has been working with your Northern Regional Office (DOT) and the Department of Commerce and Community Economic Development (DCCED) in the planning, design, and development of a new visitor facility to serve as a State-operated Alaska Public Lands Information Center, a new Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center and a rest and trip planning facility for travelers along the Alaska Highway. These agencies have been operating under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the last three years which represents a shared commitment to the project.

Strategically located in Tok, this facility will serve visitors with comprehensive statewide trip planning and information on access to all of Alaska's public lands, rest and comfort amenities, and Alaska Marine Highway reservations. As they enter the state, at this gateway State of Alaska facility, visitors will receive the most current traveler's information related to road construction, wildfire conditions, and weather to assist them with safe travel. Currently visitors arriving in Alaska by highway are greeted only by a U.S. Customs and Border Protection inspection station and a modest Service log cabin visitor contact station.

In our Fiscal Year 2003, the Service received an appropriation of \$425,000 for planning, design, and land acquisition of this facility. At that time, under the agreed terms of the MOU, the Service and DOT co-funded the contract for a design development plan with an architectural firm in Fairbanks. The 65 percent phase of the plan is receiving final review, and the 95 percent phase is underway. The Service has been negotiating with the Alaska Mental Health Trust for over two years for the purchase of a 15 acre parcel near the center of town directly on the Alaska

Mr. Mike Barton

2

Highway. If those negotiations are not successfully completed soon, with the concurrence of the DOT, the Service will advertise for other willing sellers soon after the beginning of the year. The MOU provides for the Service and DCCED to share in the majority of the maintenance and operations of the Center. The DOT will be responsible for the entrance road and parking area, vault toilets, and trash collection of the rest area.

This project serves as an excellent model of federal/state/local cooperation. The land selection was done through a public process under the *Tok Information Center Location Study* that was jointly funded by the Federal Highway Administration and the Service. The selected site is within walking distance (one half mile) of the Tok Junction, businesses, and services. If an alternate site becomes necessary, any site chosen would closely conform to the original site selection criteria. Within the last year the Service and DCCED have brought the local Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center into the project with a plan for a connective interpretive pathway between the two facilities and exhibits at the Chamber Visitor Center that will expand the theme of the Tok Interagency Public Lands Facility. This project will have significant economic benefits for Tok and will increase the momentum of regional efforts to promote tourism in Eastern Interior Alaska.

There has been huge local support for this project which has been documented in letters of support sent to State Representatives and Senators. Enclosed are letters written over the lifespan of this project from individuals representing community organizations, educational institutions, tribal councils, and local businesses. Also included are responses from State elected officials which show their commitment to this project.

Considerable funds and effort have already gone into this project and tremendous progress has been made. The project receives broad support from local communities, business, State, and Federal agencies. We urge you to reinstate the Tok Interagency Public Lands Information Center and Rest Area Facility it in the 2006-2009 STIP. We remain committed to this multi-agency project and its potential to serve as a world class welcome to thousands of visitors traveling to our great state.

Sincerely,



Acting

Rowan Gould
Regional Director

Enclosures

cc: Jeff Ottesen, DOT
Odin Brudie, DCCED



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

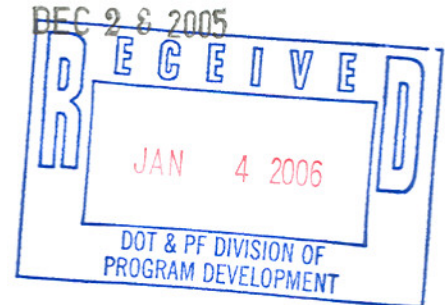
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